ODDRUNARGRATR

The Lament of Oddrun

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The *Oddrunargratr* follows *Guthrunarkvitha III* in the *Codex Regius*; it is not quoted or mentioned elsewhere, except that the composer of the "short" Sigurth lay seems to have been familiar with it. The *Volsungasaga* says nothing of the story on which it is based, and mentions Oddrun only once, in the course of its paraphrase of Brynhild's prophecy from the "short" Sigurth lay. That the poem comes from the eleventh century is generally agreed; prior to the year 1000 there is no trace of the figure of Oddrun, Atli's sister, and yet the *Oddrunargratr* is almost certainly older than the "short" Sigurth lay, so that the last half of the eleventh century seems to be a fairly safe guess.

Where or how the figure of Oddrun entered the Sigurth-Atli cycle is uncertain. She does not appear in any of the extant German versions, and it is generally assumed that she was a creation of the North, though the poet refers to "old tales" concerning her. She does not directly affect the course of the story at all, though the poet has used effectively the episode of Gunnar's death, with the implication that Atli's vengeance on Gunnar and Hogni was due, at least in part, to his discovery of Gunnar's love affair with Oddrun. The material which forms the background of Oddrun's story belongs wholly to the German part of the legend (cf. introductory note to *Gripisspo*), and is paralleled with considerable closeness in the *Nibelungenlied*; only Oddrun herself and the subsidiary figures of Borgny and Vilmund are Northern additions. The geography, on the other hand, is so utterly chaotic as to indicate that the original localization of the Atli story had lost all trace of significance by the time this poem was composed.

In the manuscript the poem, or rather the brief introductory prose note, bears the heading "Of Borgny and Oddrun," but nearly all editions, following late paper manuscripts, have given the poem the title it bears here. Outside of a few apparently defective stanzas, and some confusing transpositions, the Poem has clearly been preserved in good condition, and the beginning and end are definitely marked.

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Heithrek was the name of a king, whose daughter was called Borgny. Vilmund was the name of the man who was her lover. She could not give birth to a child until Oddrun, Atli's sister, had come to her; Oddrun had been beloved of Gunnar, son of Gjuki. About this story is the following poem.

1. I have heard it told | in olden tales
How a maiden came | to Morningland;

No one of all | on earth above
To Heithrek's daughter | help could give.

2. This Oddrun learned, | the sister of Atli,
That sore the maiden's | sickness was;
The bit-bearer forth | from his stall she brought,
And the saddle laid | on the steed so black.

3. She let the horse go | o'er the level ground,
Till she reached the hall | that loftily rose,

[*Prose*. Nothing further is known of *Heithrek*, *Borgny* or *Vilmund*. The annotator has added the name of Borgny's father, but otherwise his material comes from the poem itself. *Oddrun*, sister of Atli and Brynhild, here appears as proficient in birth. runes (cf. *Sigrdrifumol*, 8). Regarding her love for Gunnar, Guthrun's brother, and husband of her sister, Brynhild, cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, 57 and note.

1. *Olden tales*: this may be merely a stock phrase, or it may really mean that the poet found his story in oral prose tradition. *Morningland*: the poem's geography is utterly obscure. "Morningland" is apparently identical with "Hunland" (stanza 4), and yet Oddrun is herself sister of the king of the Huns. Vigfusson tries to make "Mornaland" into "Morva land" and explain it as Moravia. Probably it means little more than a country lying vaguely in the East. With stanza 28 the confusion grows worse.]

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(And in she went | from the end of the hall;)
From the weary steed | the saddle she took;
Hear now the speech | that first she spake:

4. "What news on earth, | . . . . .
Or what has happened | in Hunland now?"

A serving-maid spake:
"Here Borgny lies | in bitter pain,
Thy friend, and, Oddrun, | thy help would find."

Oddrun spake:
5. 'Who worked this woe | for the woman thus,
Or why so sudden | is Borgny sick?"

The serving-maid spake:
"Vilmund is he, | the heroes' friend,
Who wrapped the woman | in bedclothes warm,
(For winters five, | yet her father knew not)."

6. Then no more | they spake, methinks;
She went at the knees | of the woman to sit;

[3. Line 3 (cf. *Völundarkvitha*, 17) or line 5 (cf. *Thrymskvitha*, 2), both quoted from older poems, is probably spurious; the manuscript marks line 3 as the beginning of a new stanza.

4. Line 1 in the original appears to have lost its second half. In line 2 the word rendered "has happened" is doubtful. The manuscript does not indicate the speaker of lines 3-4, and a few editors assign them to Borgny herself.

5. The manuscript does not indicate the speakers. *For the woman*: conjectural; the manuscript has instead: "What warrior now hath worked this woe?" The manuscript indicates line 3 as beginning a new stanza. Line 5, apparently modeled on line, 4 of stanza n, is probably spurious.]

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With magic Oddrun | and mightily Oddrun
Chanted for Borgny | potent charms.

7. At last were born | a boy and girl,
Son and daughter | of Hogni's slayer;
Then speech the woman | so weak began,
Nor said she aught | ere this she spake:

8. "So may the holy | ones thee help,
Frigg and Freyja | and favoring gods,
As thou hast saved me | from sorrow now."

Oddrun spake:
9. "I came not hither | to help thee thus
Because thou ever | my aid didst earn;
I fulfilled the oath | that of old I swore,
That aid to all | I should ever bring,
(When they shared the wealth | the warriors had)."

[6. Charms: cf. *Sigrdrifumol*, 8.

7. *Hogni's slayer*: obviously Vilmund, but unless he was the one of Atli's followers who actually cut out Hogni's heart (cf. *Drap Niflunga*), there is nothing else to connect him with Hogni's death. Sijmons emends the line to read "Born of the sister | of Hogni's slayer.'"

8. Regarding *Frigg* as a goddess of healing cf. *Svipdagsmol*, 52, note. Regarding *Freyja* as the friend of lovers cf. *Grimnismol*, 14, note. A line is very possibly missing from this stanza.

9. The manuscript does not name the speaker. In line 2 the word rendered "earn" is omitted in the manuscript, but nearly all editions have supplied it. Line 5 is clearly either interpolated or out of place. It may be all that is left of a stanza which stood between stanzas 15 and 16, or it may belong in stanza 12.]

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Borgny spake:
10. "Wild art thou, Oddrun, | and witless now,

That so in hatred | to me thou speakest;
I followed thee | where thou didst fare,
As we had been born | of brothers twain."

Oddrun spake:
11. "I remember the evil | one eve thou spakest,
When a draught I gave | to Gunnar then;
Thou didst say that never | such a deed
By maid was done | save by me alone."

12. Then the sorrowing woman | sat her down
To tell the grief | of her troubles great.

[10-20. In the manuscript the order is as follows: 12; 13; 14; 15, 3-4; 10; 11; 16; 17; 15; 19, 1-2; 19, 1-2; 19, 3-4; 20. The changes made here, following several of the editions, are: (a) the transposition of stanzas 10-11, which are clearly dialogue, out of the body of the lament to a position just before it; (b) the transposition of lines 1-2 of stanza 15 to their present position from the middle of stanza 19.

10. The manuscript does not name the speaker; cf. note on stanzas 10-20.

11. The manuscript does not name the speaker; cf. note on stanzas 10-20. The word rendered "evil" in line 1 is a conjectural addition. Apparently Borgny was present at Atli's court while the love affair between Oddrun and Gunnar was in progress, and criticised Oddrun for her part in it. *A draught*, etc.: apparently in reference to a secret meeting of the lovers.

12. In the manuscript this stanza follows stanza 9; cf. note on stanzas 10-20. No gap is indicated, but something has presumably been lost. Grundtvig supplies as a first line: "The maid her evil days remembered," and inserts as a second line line 5 of stanza 9.]

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13. "Happy I grew | in the hero's hall
As the warriors wished, | and they loved me well;
Glad I was | of my father's gifts,
For winters five, | while my father lived.

14. "These were the words | the weary king,
Ere he died, | spake last of all:
He bade me with red gold | dowered to be,
And to Grimhild's son | in the South be wedded.

15. "But Brynhild the helm | he bade to wear,
A wish-maid bright | he said she should be;
For a nobler maid | would never be born
On earth, he said, | if death should spare her.

16. "At her weaving Brynhild | sat in her bower,
Lands and folk | alike she had;

[13. The manuscript indicates line 3 as the beginning of a new stanza; many editions combine lines 1-2 with stanza 12 and lines 3-4 with lines 1-2 of stanza 14. *The hero*: Buthli, father of Oddrun, Atli, and Brynhild.

14. The manuscript indicates line 3, but not line 1, as the beginning of a new stanza; some editions combine lines 3-4 with lines 3-4 of stanza 15. Making Buthli plan the marriage of Oddrun and Gunnar may be a sheer invention of the poet, or may point to an otherwise lost version of the legend.

15. Lines 1-2 have here been transposed from the middle of stanza 19; cf. note on stanzas 10-20. *Wish-maid*: a Valkyrie, so called because the Valkyries fullfilled Othin's wish in choosing the slain heroes for Valhall. The reference to Brynhild as a Valkyrie by no means fits with the version of the story used in stanzas 16-17, and the poet seems to have attempted to combine the two contradictory traditions, cf. *Fafnismol*, note on stanza 44. In the manuscript stanzas 10-11 follow line 4 of stanza 15.]

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The earth and heaven | high resounded
When Fafnir's slayer | the city saw.

17. "Then battle was fought | with the foreign swords,
And the city was broken | that Brynhild had;
Not long thereafter, | but all too soon,
Their evil wiles | full well she knew.

18. "Woeful for this | her vengeance was,
As so we learned | to our sorrow all;
In every land | shall all men hear
How herself at Sigurth's | side she slew.

19. "Love to Gunnar | then I gave,
To the breaker of rings, | as Brynhild might;
To Atli rings | so red they offered,
And mighty gifts | to my brother would give.

[16. In stanzas 16-17 the underlying story seems to be the one used in *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma* (particularly stanzas 32-39), and referred to in *Guthrunarkvitha I*, 24, wherein Gunnar and Sigurth lay siege to Atli's city (it here appears as Brynhild's) and are bought off only by Atli's giving Brynhild to Gunnar as wife, winning her consent thereto by falsely representing to her that Gunnar is Sigurth. This version is, of course, utterly at variance with the one in which Sigurth wins Brynhild for Gunnar by riding through the ring of flames, and is probably more closely akin to the early German traditions. In the *Nibelungenlied* Brynhild appears as a queen ruling over lands and peoples. *Fafnir's slayer*: Sigurth.

17. Cf. note on preceding stanza.

19. Cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, stanzas 64-70.

19. In the manuscript lines 1-2 of stanza 15 follow line 2, resulting in various conjectural combinations. The manuscript marks line 3 as beginning a new stanza. *Rings*, etc.: possibly, as {footnote p. 476} Gering maintains, payment offered by Gunnar and Hogni for Brynhild's death, but more probably, as in stanza 20, Gunnar's proffered "marriage gold" for the hand of Oddrun.]

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20. "Fifteen dwellings | fain would he give
For me, and the burden | that Grani bore;
But Atli said | he would never receive
Marriage gold | from Gjuki's son.

21. "Yet could we not | our love o'ercome,
And my head I laid | on the hero's shoulder;
Many there were | of kinsmen mine
Who said that together | us they had seen.

22. "Atli said | that never I
Would evil plan, | or ill deed do;
But none may this | of another think,
Or surely speak, | when love is shared.

23. "Soon his men | did Atli send,
In the murky wood | on me to spy;
Thither they came | where they should not come,
Where beneath one cover | close we lay.

24. "To the warriors ruddy | rings we offered,
That nought to Atli | e'er they should say;

[20. *Grani's burden*: the treasure won by Sigurth from Fafnir; cf. *Fafnismol*, concluding prose. The manuscript marks line 3 as beginning a new stanza, as also in stanzas 21 and 22.

23. *Murky wood*: the forest which divided Atli's realm from that of the Gjukungs is in *Atlakvitha*, 3, called Myrkwood. This hardly accords with the extraordinary geography of stanzas 28-29, or with the journey described in *Guthrunarkvitha II*, 36.]

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But swiftly home | they hastened thence,
And eager all | to Atli told.

25. "But close from Guthrun | kept they hid
What first of all | she ought to have known.
. . . .
. . . .

26. "Great was the clatter | of gilded hoofs
When Gjuki's sons | through the gateway rode;
The heart they hewed | from Hogni then,
And the other they cast | in the serpents' cave.

27. "The hero wise | on his harp then smote,
. . . .
For help from me | in his heart yet hoped
The high-born king, | might come to him.

[24. In the manuscript lines 3 and 4 stand in reversed order.

25. No gap is indicated in the manuscript; some editors assume the loss not only of two lines, but of an additional stanza. Evidently *Guthrun* has already become Atli's wife.

26. If a stanza has been lost after stanza 25, it may well have told of Atli's treacherous invitation to the Gjukungs to visit him; cf. *Drap Niflunga*, which likewise tells of the slaying of *Hogni* and Gunnar (*the other*).

27. In the manuscript these three lines follow line 2 of stanza 28. No gap is indicated in the manuscript, In the *Volsungasaga* Guthrun gives her brother the harp, with which he puts the serpents to sleep. The episode is undoubtedly related to the famous thirtieth Aventiure {*sic*} of the *Nibelungenlied*, in which Volker plays the followers of Gunther to sleep before the final battle.]

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28. "Alone was I gone | to Geirmund then,
The draught to mix | and ready to make;
Sudden I heard | from Hlesey clear
How in sorrow the strings | of the harp resounded.

29. "I bade the serving-maids | ready to be,
For I longed the hero's | life to save;
Across the sound | the boats we sailed,
Till we saw the whole | of Atli's home.

30. "Then crawling the evil | woman came,
Atli's mother-- | may she ever rot!

[28. In the manuscript the three lines of stanza 27 follow line 2, and line 3 is marked as beginning a new stanza. *Geirmund*: nothing further is known of him, but he seems to be an ally or retainer of Atli, or possibly his brother. *Hlesey*: the poet's geography is here in very bad shape. Hlesey is (or may be) the Danish island of Läsö, in the Kattegat (cf. *Harbarthsljoth*, 37 and note), and thither he has suddenly transported not only Gunnar's death-place but Atli's whole dwelling (cf. stanza 29), despite his previous references to the ride to Hunland (stanzas 3-4) and the "murky wood" (stanza 23). Geirmund's home, where Oddrun has gone, is separated from Hlesey and Atli's dwelling by a sound (stanza 29). However, geographical accuracy is seldom to be looked for in heroic epic poetry.

29. Many editions combine this stanza with lines 3-4 of stanza 28. *The sound:* cf. note on stanza 28.

30. The manuscript marks line 3 as beginning a new stanza. *Atli's mother*: the *Volsungasaga* does not follow this version; Gunnar puts all the serpents but one to sleep with his harp playing, "but a mighty and evil adder crawled to him and drove his fangs into him till they reached his heart, and so he died." It is possible that "Atli" is a scribal error for a word meaning "of serpents."]

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And hard she bit | to Gunnar's heart,
So I could not help | the hero brave.

31. "Oft have I wondered | how after this,
Serpents'-bed goddess! | I still might live,
For well I loved | the warrior brave,
The giver of swords, | as my very self.

32. "Thou didst see and listen, | the while I said
The mighty grief | that was mine and theirs;
Each man lives | as his longing wills,--
Oddrun's lament | is ended now."

[31. *Serpents'-bed goddess*: woman (i. e., Borgny); "goddess of gold" was a frequent term for a woman, and gold was often called the "serpents' bed" (cf. *Guthrunarkvitha I*, 24 and note).

32. Some editions make line 4 a statement of the poet's, and not part of Oddrun's speech.]

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